

**a barrier progression:  
an environment of sculptures and paintings**

An Honors Thesis Creative Project (HONRS 499)

By  
Mark B. Schlemmer

Thesis Advisor  
Marilynn Derwenskus

  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana  
April 13, 1992

Expected Date of Graduation: July 1993

—

—

—

Sp Coll  
Thesis  
L.D.  
2459  
.Z4  
1992  
.S35

*purpose of creative project...*

a barrier progression is a thesis that fuses interests in painting, sculpture, design and performance into a cohesive, yet multi-dimensional project. Resulting from a catalyst found in the reconstruction of the Fine Arts Terrace on the campus of Ball State University in the Spring of 1991, the project has, through much deliberation, research, and discussion, formed into a body of paintings, sculptures and performance-based conceptual pieces that probe into the actual and symbolic implications of how people deal with barriers. The culmination of the work was publicly shown from April 10-21, 1992 in Williams Lounge, Emens Auditorium, Ball State University.

## **a barrier progression**

*background, influences, etc...*

As I sat in the matted grass of the Quad, I peered through the toxic orange snow fence that surrounded the construction of the new Arts Terrace. As a student with a minor in Historic Preservation, I looked at the pile of rubble with a discerning eye. Ignorant to the justification behind the construction, I could only feel resentment toward what I saw. I knew I needed to record the situation, since the intense emotions that were stirred within me would need to be addressed in some manner. So for the next two hours I sketched my worms-eye-view of what would eventually become the catalyst of my Honors 499 project.

What started out as a pictorial record of a confused emotion found its way deep inside my mind, causing me to question views I had unknowingly formed. Why was I upset? What could I possibly do? Was I overreacting? I needed some factual information. Fortunately I was able to find out from a faculty member the rationale behind the reconstruction. Although still not satisfied with all of the answers, I more readily accepted the terrace work. Once again this new found knowledge led back to one question: Why did this bother me? In this case, self-examination led not to historic preservation issues, but self-preservation issues.

I returned to the scene and examined the situation in a purely physical sense, extracting the following thought:

what appears to be advancement has created  
a barrier between myself and the art museum,  
a primary source of inspiration and reference.

Admittedly a very powerful and dominating environment. I took images and references from this multi-faceted idea as a basis for my thesis, dwelling deeper

and narrowing to more specific terms with each additional piece.

After much deliberation, research and discussion with my thesis mentor Marilynn Derwenskus, the focus of my project became more refined. The event at the Arts Terrace had led me to probe deeper into the actual and symbolic implications of how people deal with barriers.

I began the exploration with specific images of the Fine Arts Building, but as the project evolved, I realized that the work needed to become nondescript architectonic references. Like sculptor Mary Miss, I find architectural images compelling in that they are strong and recognizable symbols that everyone can understand. Doors, walls, and stairs all have expected forms and interpretations, while at the same time they remain easily manipulated for specific messages.

After creating this series of construction-based architectonic pieces, I became interested in exploring the process involved in creating art. I focused on the concept behind the work, isolated it, and made conceptual aspects paramount. The resulting two pieces, A Seeing Decision and Furnace Ritual, present imageless interpretations of barriers, but keep the architectonic theme intact. By focusing on the concept, I challenged myself to depend on writing to create an image. The results satisfy a dual role in my project: not only are the individual pieces exploring barrier-related issues, but they are also barriers to the body of work--removing *expected* images and replacing them with new *written* images.

In the public presentation of this project (February 10-21, 1992, Williams Lounge, Emens Auditorium, Ball State University) the progression from each work to the next allowed the viewer to experience the pieces much like one would deal with personal issues: if contemplated as a whole, relationships were recognizable, but not always clear--but taken one at a time, intricacies could

be isolated, magnified, and personally interpreted. By removing myself from much of the work, I was hoping to create an open forum for all viewers--a procession that when experienced as a total environment would hopefully induce a confrontation of your *own* barriers.



The first sketch recording the destruction of the Arts Terrace, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana--June 1991

— *catalogue and descriptions...*

1. Exploited Reality (it's always been there), 1991  
construction grade 2X4's, snow fence and spot light
2. The Keep(er), 1991  
construction grade 2X4's and snow fence

— These two sculptural pieces are from an installation piece that existed for 36 hours, and remains in its entirety only on video tape, in sketches and writing. The sculpture exploited the architectural niches along the second floor corridor of the Fine Arts Building. Each niche dealt with a different aspect of recessed space and manipulations of the powerful control relating to doors. All four niches were then tied together psychologically with the underlying theme of being blockades. Exploited Reality (it's always been there) is a spot light encased in a crate made of snow fence. The light can be directed to exploit any near-by floor-level detail. Metaphorically, the sculpture draws your attention to something that has always existed, but until a stimulus occurred, was for some reason ignored (or avoided?). The Keep(er) explores the duality that exists between the medium and the symbol it represents. It is a seemingly minimalist piece consisting of a door made out of snow fence.

3. Obtainable, 1991  
oil and ash on canvas
4. Gaining Ground, 1991  
oil and ash on canvas
5. In Transition: but always continuing, 1991  
mixed media

— These two paintings and the multi-media piece present a progression up to

a barrier, represented by the art museum door. Each panel's progression presents varying views and depictions of architectural rubble and orange snow fence-physical barriers that constrict and challenge our original plans. Obtainable was the first piece created for *a barrier progression*, and was originally executed for the sole purpose of presenting the destruction of the Fine Arts Terrace. As time progressed, I found myself re-examining the images and feelings derived from the situation, and applying them to new pieces. Gaining Ground begins to represent the actual progress towards the barrier. In Transition: but always continuing is the turning point for the project in many ways. It bridges the gap between the 2-D and 3-D pieces, reflecting the style of the previous paintings, while at the same time presenting the format for the remaining sculptures. This door-sized tableau is a free standing sculpture/painting the size of an interior door (3'X7'). As viewed from the front, the piece reads as a two dimensional painting, but when approached from all other angles, transforms into a multi-dimensional piece. A cage made of snow fence was at one time mounted on the back of the piece. The cage was filled with plaster casts of human hands, but eventually fell from the mounted position. The result was a broken pile of rubble that leant itself very well as an introduction to the project as a whole.

6. Furnace Ritual, 1991  
mixed media
7. Don't Look at This, 1992  
construction grade 2X4's and snow fence
8. A Seeing Decision, 1992  
construction grade 2X4's and black ink

The final three pieces created for *a barrier progression* represent my current explorations of conceptual and performance-based art. Furnace Ritual



was an experiment for me that fused performance with sculpture. The following statement is the original summation of the occurrence:

"From November 12, 1991 to December 2, 1991 I kept a small journal noting the barriers in my life. Every day, time was spent probing for more information that would hopefully help me confront these stimuli. I needed a new direction...

On December 2, 1991, I read my journal into a small audio tape recorder.

On December 3, 1991, for an audience of approximately 15-20 people, I performed the furnace ritual in a small storage room in the Ball State University Fine Arts Building.

As the audience was escorted into the chamber, they were instructed to remain in the back half of the room. There was located in the front of the room a small furnace I had previously built, a lit candle and a compass. Carrying my journal, I worked my way to the front of the room announcing that the journal I had been keeping was a personal reflection of the barriers in my life. I then sat facing the audience and proceeded to silently tear each page from my journal. One at a time, each page was held over the flame and allowed to burn in the furnace. After a few minutes, the pre-recorded cassette could be vaguely heard emulating from within the furnace. Though it was impossible to distinguish each word or phrase, the confession of my personal thoughts was none the less exposed for the crowd to experience.

After 15-20 minutes the crowd began to disperse, leaving me with a gathering of a few people. As the ritual progressed, many in the audience began to participate in the ritual by expressing a desire to confront their various barriers.

When the last page was destroyed (or purified) I opened the furnace and removed the audio cassette. Pulling the tape from its casement, I ripped and marred the surface, making sure that there was no recorded evidence of the journal. After taking a deep breath, I realized that it was over. I blew out the candle, walked out of the room and locked the door behind me...

Total time elapsed: 45 minutes (approximately)

What remains of the performance is merely an after image, a reminder of the ritual and the emotions that it surfaced."

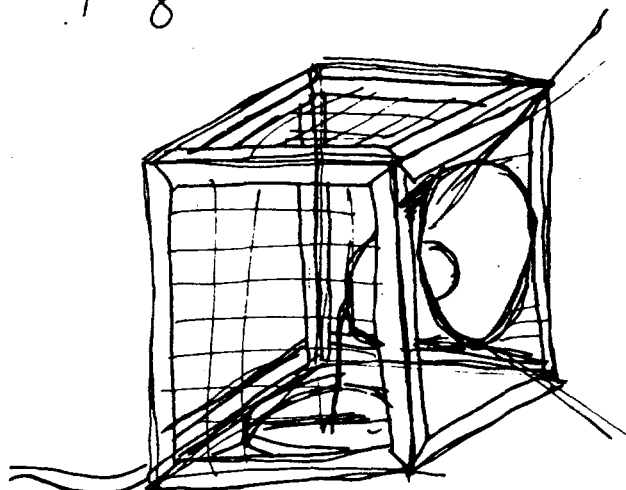
Don't Look at This was created as a site-specific work that blocked a sculpture permanently installed in the Williams Lounge from the viewer. The project was influenced by the conceptual metaphors that result from creating a barrier to art. A Seeing Decision uses physical space, distance, and multiple

vantage points to entice the viewer to explore and contemplate the challenge of the message: my personal philosophy about what art is, written on a barred window made of wood.

N1 : N4 ? ?

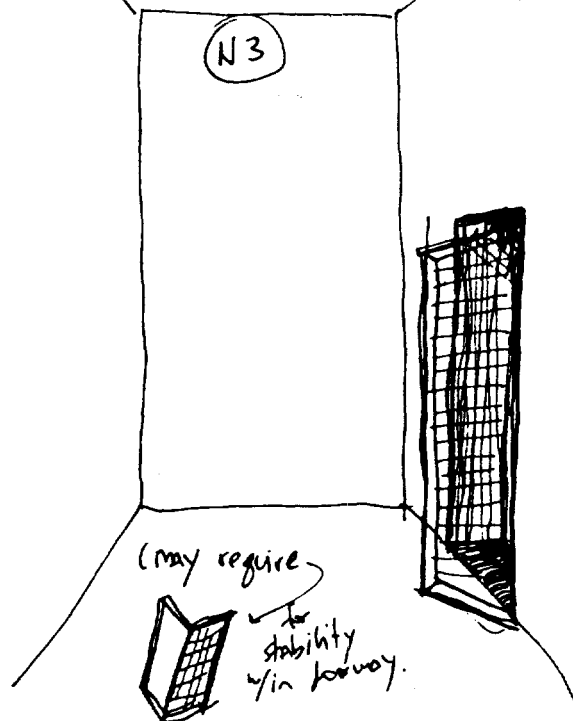
- N4 I think can stand on its own AS A heavily lit space - but how?

- outlet located across from N4 about 4' down from opening



• box built around the dimensions of a spotlight covered on all sides but one w/ snow fence - set across hall from N-4 near outlet and light to darkest N10.

build a 'new' door of wood framing and snow fence to be propped open blurring the concept of what the snow fence represents and actually what door represents. AN open barrier??



Sketch book drawings showing the initial notes and drawings for the realization of the niche piece. The Keep(er) and Exploited Reality (it's always been there) both derive from this installation.

*materials...*

The materials chosen for the realization of a barrier progression carry with them very strong, physical meanings. Orange snow fence, ashes, and construction-grade 2X4's fuse in different ways to both reinforce the architectonic emphasis and augment the symbolic implications of the total body of work.

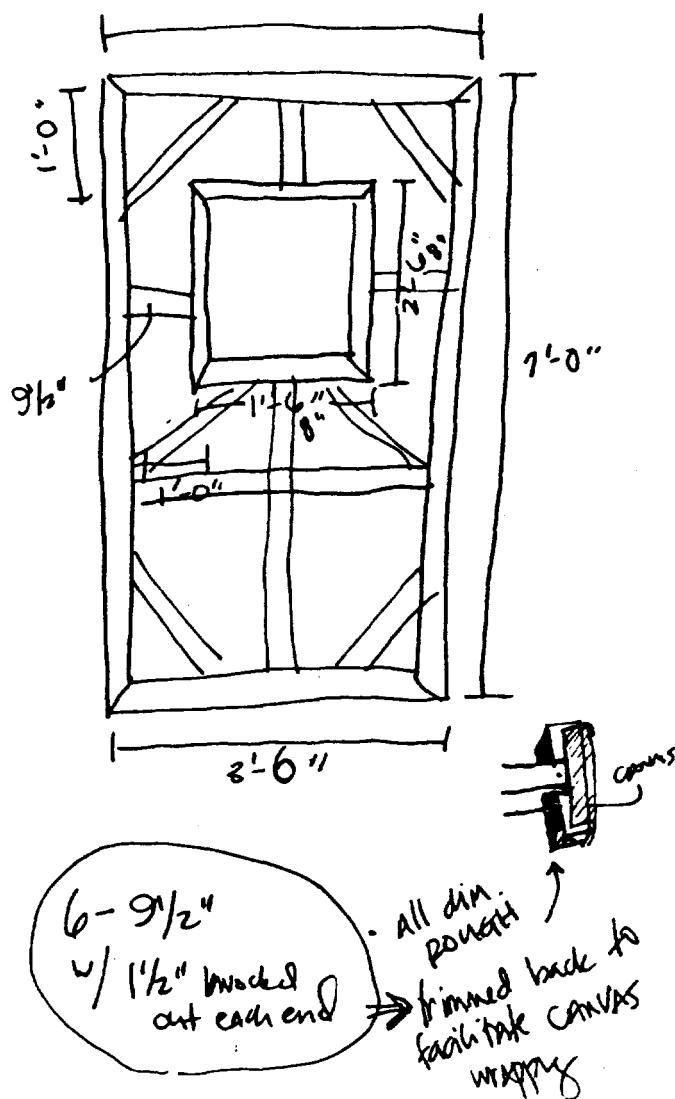
I was first attracted to the toxic orange-colored snow fence for the dictating power it possesses. To me, it was the ultimate barrier--it not only commanded and warned people, but it demanded respect that few people would violate. But there is a side of irony to this material that makes its appeal as a sculptural medium even more enticing. Taken as is, this material is flimsy; a plastic fence. Hardly a powerful barrier--but how many of life's challenges are really as constricting as they seem? Like the snow fence, ashes that I have repeatedly used hold a symbolic meaning as well.

When I first implemented the use of ashes, it was to infect in the viewer a sense of destruction. In this case, the destruction of the old Arts Terrace. I saw ashes as the by-product of a tempestuous act. By mixing ashes with oil paint, I was able to present a mixture of materials that not only created a rich surface, but also held a symbolic meaning. As the project drew to a close, I found myself turning once again toward the ashes, but for a new reason.

Ashes can represent not only destruction, but also purification. In the furnace performance piece, the remaining ashes exist as the cremated remains of something personal and sacred. The purification power of fire has created the same by-product as the destructive power previously represented. This duality is also apparent in the wood constructions.

Construction framing elements have appealed to me for multiple reasons. Framing is the most basic construction--the support for a more complex system. It can represent any facet of construction, from barriers (doors) to shelters (boxes). This one basic material possesses the power to protect you, and at the same time trap you in your own anxiety.

By fusing together all of these media: orange snow fence, ashes, and construction grade 2X4's, I attempted to create an environment in which the materials themselves held just as strong a meaning as the art they produced.



Construction drawings for the creation of the framework, joinery and supports in the multi-media piece

In Transition: but always continuing.

— *afterthoughts...*

As I reflect back onto this project that literally controlled my life for the last 10 months, I can readily see how I have advanced as an art student. By being challenged to create a unified, yet multi-dimensional project, I have learned how to focus my thoughts and channel them into specific directions. Working with my mentor Marilyn Derwenskus has pushed my understanding of art as a process, and has taught me to pair my own ideas with research and critique. By learning more about the art that others have created, I have been able to advance my own artistic endeavors. All of the time and energy I have put into *a barrier progression* has fused into a model catalyst. The realization of this project has laid the foundation for a lifetime of artistic challenges.

—

—

*literature references...*

Adcock, Craig. "New Works in Terry Allen's 'Youth in Asia' Series." Arts Magazine. December 1987: 44-55.

Berger, Maurice. Labyrinths-Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960's. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Berman, Avris. "Space Exploration." ARTnews. November, 1989: 130-135.

Buckley, Peter. "Jennifer Bartlett." Horizon. June 1985: 42-48.

Cooke, Lynne. "Report From Paris Cobraphilia." Art In America. Summer 1983: 29-32.

"Christo." Current Biography. 1977: 110-112.

Gilmour, John C. "Original Representations and Anselm Kiefer's Postmodernism." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. Spring 1988: 341- 350.

Groot, Paul. "Amsterdam Anselm Kiefer." Art Forum. April 1987: 143.

Hubl, Michael. "The Melancholist of Virtuosity." ARTnews. February 1989: 120-125.

Kalina, Richard. "William Anastasi: Deadpan Conceptualist." Art In America. January 1990: 144-149.

Kostelanetz, Richard. John Cage. New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1970.

Kuspit, Donald B. "Acts of Aggression: German Painting Today, Part II." Art In America. January 1983: 90-106.

-- "Beuys: Fat, Felt, and Alchemy." Art In America. May 1980: 78-89.

Lauf, Cornelia. "The Word That Produces All Images." Arts Magazine. March 1990: 66-71.

Meyer, Ursula. Conceptual Art. New York: E.P. Putton & Co., Inc., 1972.

Owens, Craig. "Telling Stories." Art In America. May 1981: 129-135.

Plagens, Peter. "Site Wars." Art In America. January 1982: 90-98.

Ratcliff, Carter. "Longo's Logos." Art Forum. January 1990: 105-110.

Schechner, Richard. The End of Humanism. New York: Performing Arts  
Journal Publications.

Schwabsky, Barry. "Gerhard Richter." Arts Magazine. May 1990: 91.

Sherlock, Maureen P., "Gerhard Richter." Arts Magazine. February 1989: 87.  
1982.

Vaizey, Marina. Christo. New York: Rizzoli, 1990.

Wooster, Ann-Sargent. "Art Sounds." Art In America. February 1982: 116-  
125.

documentation...

Enclosed are the following documentations of *a barrier progression*:

1. Announcement flyer
2. Artist statement
3. Video cassette of show





# a barrier progression

AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES BY MARK A. SCHLESINGER

Ball State University  
Hagens Auditorium  
Hagens Lounge

February 10-28, 1992

Reception

February 10, 11AM-2PM

Department of Art College of Fine Arts Ball State University

# a barrier progression

## INFLUENCES, ETC...

A few days ago, I watched as the orange snow fence was finally removed from around the Arts Terrace construction site. Since the catalyst for this project stemmed from the reconstruction of the Terrace, it seemed oddly ironic that the final phases of the construction coincided with the completion of my project. As one barrier was coming down, another was going up...

As a student with a minor in Historic Preservation, I could not help but question the destruction of the Terrace. Though the justification has since been *explained* to me, at the time, it was an alarming occurrence. Upon witnessing the construction site for the first time, I felt compelled to record the situation. As I sat in the matted grass, I sketched my worms-eye view of the first stages of demolition. Soon after, this sketch became the painting *Obtainable*. Though this painting was not intentionally created as a beginning to a whole, it unknowingly brought up questions that helped me formulate this project.

After much deliberation, research and discussion with my thesis mentor Marilynn Derwenskus, the focus of my project became more refined. The event at the Arts Terrace had led me to probe deeper into the actual and symbolic implications of how people deal with barriers.

I began the exploration with specific images of the Fine Arts Building, but as the project evolved, I realized that the work needed to become nondescript architectonic references. Like sculptor Mary Miss, I find architectural images compelling in that they are strong and recognizable symbols that everyone can understand. Doors, walls, and stairs all have expected forms and interpretations, while at the same time they remain easily manipulated for specific messages.

After creating this series of construction-based architectonic pieces, I became interested in exploring the process involved in creating art. I focused on the concept behind the work, isolated it, and made conceptual aspects paramount. The resulting two pieces, A Seeing Decision and Furnace Ritual, present imageless interpretations of barriers, but keep the architectonic theme intact. By focusing on the concept, I challenged myself to depend on writing to replace an image. The results satisfy a dual role in this exhibit: not only are the individual pieces exploring barrier-related issues, but they are also barriers to this exhibit, removing expected images and replacing them with written statements.

In the presentation of this project, the progression from each work to the next allows the viewer to experience the pieces much like one would deal with personal issues: if contemplated as a whole, relationships are recognizable, but not always clear--but taken one at a time, smaller intricacies can be isolated, magnified, and personally interpreted. By removing myself from much of the work, I am hoping to create an open forum for all viewers--a procession that when experienced as a total environment will hopefully induce a confrontation of your *own* barriers.

February 10-28, 1992

## MATERIALS & CATALOGUE

The materials chosen for the realization of *a barrier progression* carry with them very strong, physical meanings. Orange snow fence, ashes, and construction-grade 2X4's fuse in different ways to both reinforce the architectonic emphasis and augment the symbolic implications of the total body of work.

I was first attracted to the toxic orange-colored snow fence for the dictating power it possesses. To me, it was the ultimate barrier--it not only commanded and warned people, but it demanded respect that few people would violate. But there is a side of irony to this material that makes its appeal as a sculptural medium even more enticing. Taken as is, this material is plastic; a flimsy plastic fence. Hardly a powerful barrier--but how many of life's challenges are really as constricting as they seem? Like the snow fence, ashes that I have repeatedly used hold a symbolic meaning as well.

When I first implemented the use of ashes, it was to infect in the viewer a sense of destruction. In this case, the destruction of the old Arts Terrace. I saw ashes as the by-product of a tempestuous act. By mixing ashes with oil paint, I was able to present a mixture of materials that not only created a rich surface, but also held a symbolic meaning. As the project drew to a close, I found myself turning once again toward the ashes, but for a new reason.

Ashes can represent not only destruction, but also purification. In the furnace performance piece, the remaining ashes exist as the cremated remains of something personal and sacred. The purification power of fire has created the same by-product as the destructive power previously represented. This duality is also apparent in the wood constructions.

Construction framing elements have appealed to me for multiple reasons. Framing is the most basic construction--the support for a more complex system. It can represent any facet of construction, from barriers (doors) to shelters (boxes). This one basic material possesses the power to protect you, and at the same time trap you in your own anxiety.

By fusing together all of these media: orange snow fence, ashes, and construction-grade 2X4's, I am attempting to create an environment in which the materials themselves hold just as strong a meaning as the art they produce.

- 
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. <u>Exploited Reality (it's always been there)</u><br>-from <i>Niche</i> 10.2.91-10.5.91 | 5. <u>The Keep(er)</u><br>-from <i>Niche</i> 10.2.91-10.5.91 |
| 2. <u>Obtainable</u>   | 6. <u>A Seeing Decision</u>                                  |
| 3. <u>Gaining Ground</u>   | 7. <u>Don't Look at This</u>                                 |
| 4. <u>In Transition: but always continuing</u>   | 8. <u>Furnace Ritual</u> (performed 12.3.91)                 |

Mark B. Schlemmer

DEPARTMENT OF ART--COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS/BALL STATE UNIVERSITY